(d) The Government has been taking steps to overcome the shortage of staff. The Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) of the Ministry of Finance has recently carried out a study of Passport Offices all over the country and their final report on augmentation of staff is awaited. The Staff Selection Commission has recently made available dossiers of 57 Lower Division Clerks (LDCs), which are bring processed to fill up the existing vacancies.

Promotion of Indian culture and Hindi abroad

t2472. SHRI LAXMINARAYAN SHARMA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the arrangements made in various embassies for propagation of Indian culture and Hindi;

(b) the activities carried out towards this goal during the past two years, and the role of ICCR in it; and

(c) the reason for which ICCR has not been entrusted for its empowerment to department of culture?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) to (c) Indian Mission/Posts abroad are actively engaged in promotion and propagation of Indian culture and Hindi. Many of the activities undertaken by them in this regard are organized in coordination with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), which is an autonomous body of the Ministry of External Affairs. Indian Cultural Centres have also been specifically set up by the ICCR as required.

To showcase Indian culture abroad, 8 major exhibitions have been sent by ICCR during the last two years, apart from a number of smaller exhibitions. 199 Indian cultural troupes of music and dance forms were sent to various countries for performances, which were organized by the Mission/Posts in conjunction with local bodies. In addition, 5 life size statues, 18 busts of famous Indian personalities and a replica of the Ashoka Capital were unveiled abroad. As part of the Distinguished Outgoing Visitors Programme, the ICCR sent 137 distinguished scholars to various countries for giving lectures and for participating in different Seminars/Conferences.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Visiting Hindi Professors are regularly deputed to the 12 Hindi Chairs maintained by ICCR in various foreign universities/institutions. Indian Missions/Posts encouraged foreign nationals to learn Hindi, for which local Hindi learning classes are organized with local residents as Hindi teachers. Local organizations engaged in promotion and teaching of Hindi abroad are supported financially by Missions/Posts abroad as well as through donation of textbooks, dictionaries, audio-visual cassettes, computer software, CD-ROMs, Hindi magazines and children's literature. Special Hindi learning kits have also been provided to Missions/Posts, which are in great demand. Literary events essay competitions and Kavi Sammelans are organized by Missions/Posts, apart from celebration of Hindi divas.

To encourage use of Hindi abroad, on national days, the President's address to the Nation is read out in Hindi by most Missions/Posts abroad. From time to time, Hindi Conferences are organized abroad to propagate Hindi abroad. A regional Hindi Conference was organized in Romania in July, 2004. Panels of Hindi interpreters have also been set up in 30 countries.

The activities of ICCR for promotion and propagation of Indian culture and Hindi abroad are closely synchronized with the overall activities of Indian Missions/Posts abroad, which are instrumental in the implementation of ICCR's policies and programmes abroad. Accordingly, to ensure and strengthen the activities of the ICCR, it functions as an autonomous body under the Ministry of External Affairs. However, mechanisms for coordination with the Ministry of Culture already exist. Secretary (Culture) is a member of the General Assembly of the ICCR and is also a member of the Planning Committee and Governing Body of ICCR.

Routes for cross-border visit

2473. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to open more routes to enable people from India and Pakistan to visit their relatives in each others country;

(b) if so, the details thereof;